

# MORPHEUS TALES

# CONTENTS

## Fantasy Femmes Special

First Week By Andrew Morris	Page 2
fée au coin de l'oeil By Sébastien Epsylöhn Bellanger	Page 4
The Tigress By A.J. Cooper	Page 5
Woodland Witch By Sue Miller	Page 8
Body Doubles By Joe L. Murr	Page 9
13 Inches By Nekro	Page 15
Catrina of Rozvalean By Robin Lanyon	Page 16
Fantasy Femme By David Burton	Page 20
Mystery's Vast Empty By Lee Thompson	Page 21
Oracle By LeMat	Page 26
Strangle World By William Couper	Page 27
Artwork By Bill Munster	Page 31
Abigail By Ray Kolb	Page 32
Meltoriel By LeMat	Page 38
Cover By Tomasz Alen Kopera	

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# First Week By Andrew Momis

Mary sits cross-legged in her new apartment. Finally settled in. She's thrown the boxes out, hooked up the cable, and has even gotten a few pieces of junk mail.

The phone rings and it's Mom. Mary answers and Mom is sobbing, missing her.

"Oh why, oh why, oh why did you have to move so far away, Mary?"

And Mary's eyes roll. She lets out a smile that even her mother recognizes over the phone.

"You're not taking any of this seriously!"

"Mom! I'm fine! Everything is fine. This is a really nice place. Every door's got a lock. And an alarm."

"Is that supposed to make me feel better?"

"Well... it's gonna have to. I'm here now."

Then a knock at the door. Not a particularly menacing one. Nor was it a friendly shave-and-a-hair-cut. Just a simple knock-knock-knock on the front door.

Mom continues worrying out loud but Mary interrupts:

"Someone's here."

"What do you mean, 'Someone's here'? Did you meet someone already?"

"No. It's probably just the Landlord."

And with that Mary stands, phone in hand, walks over to the door and looks through the peephole. On the other side of the door she sees a man (or woman, she thinks) standing, looking directly at her, wearing what appears to be a brand new, solid black ski mask.

"Hello." A man's voice. Grinning. Bleached teeth.

"Hey, Mom. I have to go."

"You do? Who is it?"

# The Tigress By A.J. Cooper

The woman's clothes fit her body more tightly than custom allowed. A sash covered her breasts and a pair of short cotton pants revealed her muscular thighs. Her well-sewn garments were dyed sky blue. She had tied her long black hair into a single braid, which glistened with jewellery - silver clips studded with sapphire, ruby and lapis lazuli.

She wielded her two elegantly curved sabres with pride - for miles around she was known as Saboo the Tigress, a desert beauty feared by powerful men. She was hated by the corrupt, and adored by those to whom she extended her helping, if harsh, hand.

A black kitten knelt nearby, surveying the sprawling desert. She was barely six weeks old, small and bony, and fit easily in Saboo's hand.

The woman stooped down to stroke her wet nose, and gave her fur a gentle rub. The kitten yawned, revealing her pink gums and sharp white fangs.

"Only a little while longer," Saboo comforted her. The poor thing hated long travels, and she had only a half-filled waterskin between them both.

A violent wind tossed up desert sands, and Saboo knew a storm drew near. Sandstorms in the Hama Desert could be deadly, but they were approaching an oasis. She knew her way around the world - she had travelled the scorching desert before, from the pyramids of Heliopolis to the arid bazaars of Azijan; from the salty seas to the green, lush tropics of Molkoro.

In the distance, at the foot of the dune, Saboo spied a lush oasis overgrown with palm trees, bushes, and irrigated crops. The reflection of candles and torches sparkled in the water - it was the village of Hamzu, the dominion of the iron-fisted caliph, Alabar. A worse caliph couldn't be found in the Eastern Deserts, perhaps not in all Hammidia. Months ago he had sent thieves to steal the Lunar Pendant from the temple at Lunapolis, a magic charm that granted eternal youth to whoever wore it. The mission her Sisters had given her was simple: retrieve the pendant; but she wouldn't stop there.

Saboo knew what Alabar deserved, and was always eager to prove herself stronger than men.

She shivered. The clothes she wore didn't suffice to warm her. Their sole purpose was to anger the caliphs, who permitted only dancers to dress in such a way. But she was not afraid of their idle threats. Shivering, she draped a thick cloak about her shoulders and pulled the hood over her face.

Her movements were precise and practiced as she quietly descended the dune, unseen in the shadows. The kitten followed without a sound.

In the village, Saboo heard shouting, shuffling feet and chanting. The clamour increased in volume as she approached, sounding more and more like religious ritual.

She raced down the slope, the sand sinking smoothly through her toes.

The people of Hamzu danced in unison around a grotesque granite statue, carved in the form a six-armed, nine-breasted fiend. Perhaps it was a fertility goddess. No doubt it was a thing of nightmares, an abomination that had crawled up from the belly of the earth.

she demanded, "Beg for mercy."

Alabar bared the few teeth he had. "I'd sooner die than beg the mercy of a tigress."

# Body Doubles By Joe L. Murr

Catherine's reflection steps out of the bedroom mirror. She says the lines Catherine wrote for her. Catherine retreats, tumbles backwards onto the bed.

"Shoot me," her reflection says. Her silk nightgown hangs open, the belt slithers to the floor. "You know you want to."

"Get back in there," Catherine whispers.

"Where's your camcorder?" the double says and kneels to pick up the belt. "I know you want to shoot this. I know I want to. See what magic you can work on the footage."

"Wait. We need to plan it. We need a plan." Something has to be done about the lighting. The blocking has to be worked out.

Her double climbs onto the bed and crawls on top of her on all fours. Her lips brush against her lips. "You know the plan. You wrote the script."

"I need to get my gear." There is a hand between her legs - and momentarily she is unsure whether it's her own or her double's - hers, it's her own.

The other smiles and then loops the silk belt around Catherine's neck. "Okay. Let's go get it."

###

Catherine framed Johnny against the greenscreen. He shivered in the viewfinder of the HD camcorder, his executive tan prickled with goose pimples. The single radiator wasn't doing a great job of heating the drafty garage studio. The chill in the air hadn't made her client lose his erection. His glands throbbed purple against the green backdrop. It made her think of a leech stuck on Kermit the Frog. The cock pointed at his co-star, the magnetic north of his obsession. The actress sat in a plastic chair, dressed in a bathrobe and blank as a mannequin.

"Sara," he said.

The actress didn't reply. Catherine didn't permit the talent to talk with her clients before the first scene - and never out of character.

"She looks just like her," Johnny said. "Like Sara."

"That's the idea," Catherine said.

"Where did you find her?"

"Trade secret." The city was full of look-alikes, actors and actresses all angling desperately for a piece of the action, any action.

"It's uncanny."

"That's what you're paying me for. Well, let's get started."

"You mean just get right down to it?" Johnny said. "I'd like to talk with her first."

"Trust me."

# Catrina of Rozvalean By Robin Lanyon

Catrina, the mere mention of her name made men sigh and women turn green with envy. With hair the colour of red wine and skin as soft and delicate as whipped cream, a more stunning creature could not be found in the village of Rozvalean.

A stranger came one day to the place where gypsies dance, and love is made in the sight of both man and God. Although his appearance was quite striking, this man bore a sinister look that told of dark secrets bathed in blood. It was here in the village of Rozvalean where he decided to bury his past, and instead pursue a new life free from those who would seek vengeance upon him. For the atrocities he committed were great.

Soon the village was buzzing with the news that a visitor had arrived, and it wasn't long before word of this reached the lovely Catrina's ears. As quickly, yet subtly as she could manage, the blue-eyed beauty swept into the village circle with all the grace of a swan gliding upon the still waters.

"Good day to you, sir," she said in a voice that could seduce the very clouds into weeping tears of unrequited love.

At first sight of this exquisite being the stranger's heart sang a melody of forgotten bliss in a time before evil reigned supreme within his soul.

"My name is Catrina and I would like to welcome you to our humble village," she said, smiling ever so sweetly.

"Cat-a-rina," the man could hardly release the name from his lips.

"Cat-a-rina, I like that. You may call me Catarina if you wish. What is your name stranger?" She asked batting her eyes ever so coyly.

"My name is Sergei," the stranger answered weakly. This was not his real name and he was not yet comfortable with the sound of it.

"Sergei, I like that name. It sounds so masculine," she flirted, bending lower so that he could see the amplex of her bosom.

"Do you have any inns here?" He asked, hoping instead she would offer him a room in her cottage.

"There are no inns here, but if you would like to stay there is an encampment of gypsies along the river bank. You may set up camp near them. Tonight is the Festival of the Moon. You are welcome to attend."

"What do you do at this festival?"

"We eat, drink and make merry." She said and then pressed her lips near his ear and whispered, "I will be waiting for you."

No other words needed to be spoken. The warmth of her breath tickling his ear was all the urging that he required. He would be there no matter at what cost.

Gypsies travelled from all around to attend the Festival of the Moon. When they came this time they brought with them stories of the outside world. One such story was of a conqueror called Vlad, who led a group of men on a bloody rampage plundering villages, raping women and killing all who stood in their way, even children. When his massacre had ended, he slaughtered his own men and then disappeared into the mist never to be heard from again. Legend had it that this man was so fearless and so ruthless that he ate some of his fiercest adversaries alive. From that day forth he became known as Vlad the Cannibal.

Fantasy Femme By David Burton

# Mystery's Vast Empty By Lee Thompson

Mystery snuck around the old Victorian. The wind bent hundreds of acres of wheat. Desperation saturated the house's dark aura. It mirrored a boy's dying soul growing into that of a man. Trees surrounded the house. Thunder boomed and leaves stirred; a gentle rustle like an ocean wave across the yard.

She shivered.

*Father, forgive me this once. If not for me, then for Beel. Let him free and allow him back into the master's chamber. I lay my penance yet again like oil upon your feet - the foundation of truth and hardship.*

A scream echoed through Mystery's head, bounced along the path to this gateway representing heaven and hell. She whispered curses and blessings and pulled at the waves of air stirring her red hair.

*He is in there somewhere.*

She slipped through the back door. The house smelled like stale bread and staler sweat, the exertions of a man driven mad by his demons. *Take the cup, take the bread.* Snores beat against the closed door down the hall. The house settled and she tasted dust, a premonition. Mystery put a hand to the wall and let it guide her towards the kitchen, her senses perked to blood flowing through veins crammed with the vile nature of man and his constant burden.

*I know this constant burden.*

The family creed.

*I know this constant burden.* They took the words from the wind, from the land, from a god who lorded over them and left warriors' wings in tatters, stripped of beauty, until there was nothing left but residue.

*I don't blame you, but the lines of grey spread over both sides of the fence - the good and bad. Forgive my brother. Set him free. Then this can end.*

She held her breath and moved along the wall, towards the pale outline of the hall. The scent of burnt skin hung in the air.

Her hand stopped on a face in the dark. Bulbous lips moved beneath her palm. Mystery jumped back. The shadows snickered. Her body tensed. The creature growled, "You've come to the wrong house, Great Whore. We are many."

The air between them shimmered.

*No!*

Tentacles flashed in the darkness. Light erupted inside her eyes. Her mouth went slack and her head slammed off the wall. She lashed out blindly. Her fist sank into its ethereal meat. She tried to grab a hold of it, dig her nails into its heart. Mystery tasted long dead leaves, both prayers and curses in the Old Tongue.

"God's not here. Not for you." It slapped her.

She spit blood back in its face, regained her footing.

*I know who you are.*

The Beast of a Thousand Faces laughed and howled, saliva splashing against her neck. The moon sent in a sliver of pale light. She reached for it. One of his cold arms shot out and closed around her throat. He hissed like a serpent, "Let go... "

# Strangle World By William Couper

A large area of the forest shattered as the ship came down. Shards of elaborate crystal fragments were thrown for many meters like a constellation of displaced stars and comets.

The angular things that jutted from the ground were not trees. They looked like bare trees, with naked branches and trunks, but they had no leaves and never would. There had been no live trees here for centuries. Even the earth wasn't really earth anymore. These crystalline-circuitry things were another one of the mysteries of this planet.

Earth. Even the name was frightening. Strangle World was the more apt slang. No right-thinking person had set foot on this rock for the last hundred years, and she read all the documentation from those awful expeditions.

There was still a raft of mysteries surrounding what took place then. The survivors either gave garbled and contradictory reports or they refused to speak of what had taken place. The ones who never spoke of it were the ones who, she felt, understood what was going on here the most. Remaining silent about the planet was a tacit warning to stay away.

A warning that she and her team may have been best to heed, she thought.

She used to love the work. Being a freelancer was a challenge that she once thrived on, now she was weary of it all. Taking this job underlined that fact. The preparations had taken four times longer than was necessary; she had rationalised her hesitancy by saying it was in deeper preparation for the unknown dangers. The truth was that she couldn't face going out into the hunt for salvage again.

Still, Gretchen Mardier had picked one of her best teams ever. Given the amount of reward involved, it should be.

The landing and disembarking went perfectly and the transport ship had gone into high orbit, leaving a glowing hot clearing. They were now on their own and walking through the bizarre grove away from the landing site and the ground that refused to cool even a few fractions of a degree, it was something that Harkins was fascinated by and had almost been lost in her thoughts had Gretchen not barked at her to get a move on. The science-minded woman had been in sullen silence ever since.

"Now that is a pretty sky," said Sanchez.

"With the amount of poisons and pollutants in the atmosphere it's hardly surprising the clouds glow like that," she said.

"You've got to admit, it's prettier than most things you'd get in nature, Gretchen."

"That may be true, Sanchez, but don't let it distract you too much. This planet is one big hazard."

The crystalline trees swayed as though in agreement. That strange tinkling sound they made as they moved caused everyone in the team to jump. The sharp-edged, shining limbs moved towards them.

Gretchen was aware of what the tips of those branches could do to a living target. They were among the catalogue of horrors on this planet. The current number of documented physical threats on the planet ran into the hundreds of thousands; and that was believed to be a fraction of a percentage of the deadly hazards residing on Strangle World. Her suit adjusted itself in response to her heightened heart rate and breathing. It was going on the alert just as she was.

# Abigail By Ray Kolb

“I’m watching you.”

He clutched the phone in his hands, feeling its power, knowing she was engulfed in fear.

“Please,” she said. “Leave me alone.”

This was the second night he’d called her.

“I will,” he said. “If you’ll do me a favour.”

“What?”

“Suck my cock.”

He laughed as she slammed the phone down. He couldn’t wait to call her again tomorrow night.

###

Twenty-four hours.

Time to make another call.

Sitting in his favourite chair, he dialled her number, anxiously awaiting the first ring. Instead, he heard a quasi-feminine metallic voice say, “I’m sorry. The number you have dialled has been discontinued. If you-”

He put the phone down and smiled. She was bright. Usually it took five or six calls before they finally changed their numbers.

He’d have to find another one.

He picked up the phone book and threw it in the air. The book landed in a jumble on the floor. A page twisted into a partial cone, sticking out from the others.

“A sign.”

He leaned over and picked up the phone book, careful to keep the twisted page in his sight. He closed his eyes, raised his middle finger and stabbed the page.

Opening his eyes, he read the name.

Abigail Belial.

“A woman on the first try.” He smiled. “Another good sign.”

Picking up the phone, he lightly pressed its buttons. Seven numbers introducing him to Abigail Belial.

By the fifth ring, he decided to hang up. Just before he placed the phone on its station, he heard a faint, “Yes.” His smile broadened. Putting the phone back to his ear, he whispered, “Abigail.”

“Yes.” The voice was still faint, but he detected huskiness, an appealing sexuality. He would enjoy talking to Abigail.

“I’m watching you,” he said. He waited for the inevitable sense of fear to take hold of her. He swore he could feel it emanating through the phone.

“Good,” she said.

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